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# New Hampshire

*Department of Agriculture,  
Markets & Food*

## Night Night, Sleep Tight Don't let the bed-bugs bite. If they do.....

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That often heard seemingly innocent children's bedtime rhyme now seems to have a more stressful meaning for a growing number of people in North America. In the past decade, bed bugs have quietly made a comeback, as evidenced by infestations reported in Canada and in more than half of the United States. Hot spots in the East include New York, Massachusetts, and Florida. Pest exterminators and the CDC both report that bed bug complaints have increased dramatically in recent years. The most prevalent reasons suggested for the resurgence of the bugs are increased global travel, the ban of DDT and other broad-range pesticides, and the use of more selective control agents, such as baits, for controlling ants, roaches, and other household pests.

Specimens sent by New Hampshire residents to the NH Dept of Agriculture, Markets & Food, Division of Plant Industry for identification have been either the common bed bug or a related species of bat bug. The bed bug is a 1/4-3/8 inch long, wingless, reddish-brown insect with an oval, flattened body. Bed bugs are gregarious, fast-moving insects that prefer to hide in cracks and crevices during the daytime and come out at night to feed on the sleeping host's blood. Because of their small size and compressed body shape, bed bugs are readily transported in luggage, clothing, bedding, and furniture, and have been found on many forms of public transportation, as well as in public dwellings such as hotels, motels, college dormitories, homeless shelters, and apartment complexes. Adult bed bugs can survive for 12-18 months without feeding, enabling them to persist even in abandoned or seasonal dwellings for long periods of time.

The common bed bug prefers to feed on humans, but will feed on other animals as well. Full-grown bed bugs may feed for ten to fifteen minutes, after which they hide in cracks or tiny gaps for several days, digesting the blood meal. Initially, the bugs hide in and around the seams and folds of mattresses, later spreading to cracks and crevices in the bed frame. In heavier infestations, the bugs may hide in any small, dark crevices, such as cracks in the walls, floor, room trim, furniture, and behind wallpaper.

Signs and symptoms of bed bugs infestation include: small, itchy, red bites in rows of three or so anywhere on the body, particularly areas of skin exposed while sleeping; brown to black spots of dried blood excrement on sheets, pillowcases, or mattresses; and eggs, egg shells, and cast skins. A distinct odor described as "sickly sweet smelling" is present in areas with heavy infestations.

Although bed bugs can carry blood-borne diseases, they've never been known to transmit diseases to their hosts. Bed bug bites are normally just an itchy nuisance, but some people have experienced allergic reactions to the saliva, insomnia, or stress. In addition, heavy infestations can cause anemia in children and the elderly.

Control of moderate to heavy infestations of bed bugs is difficult and is best handled by a professional exterminator. Several different species of bugs may be encountered, so correct identification is essential to successful eradication. If you suspect you have bed bugs, collect some specimens and submit them to a professional for identification and advice on control methods. For more information contact the:

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